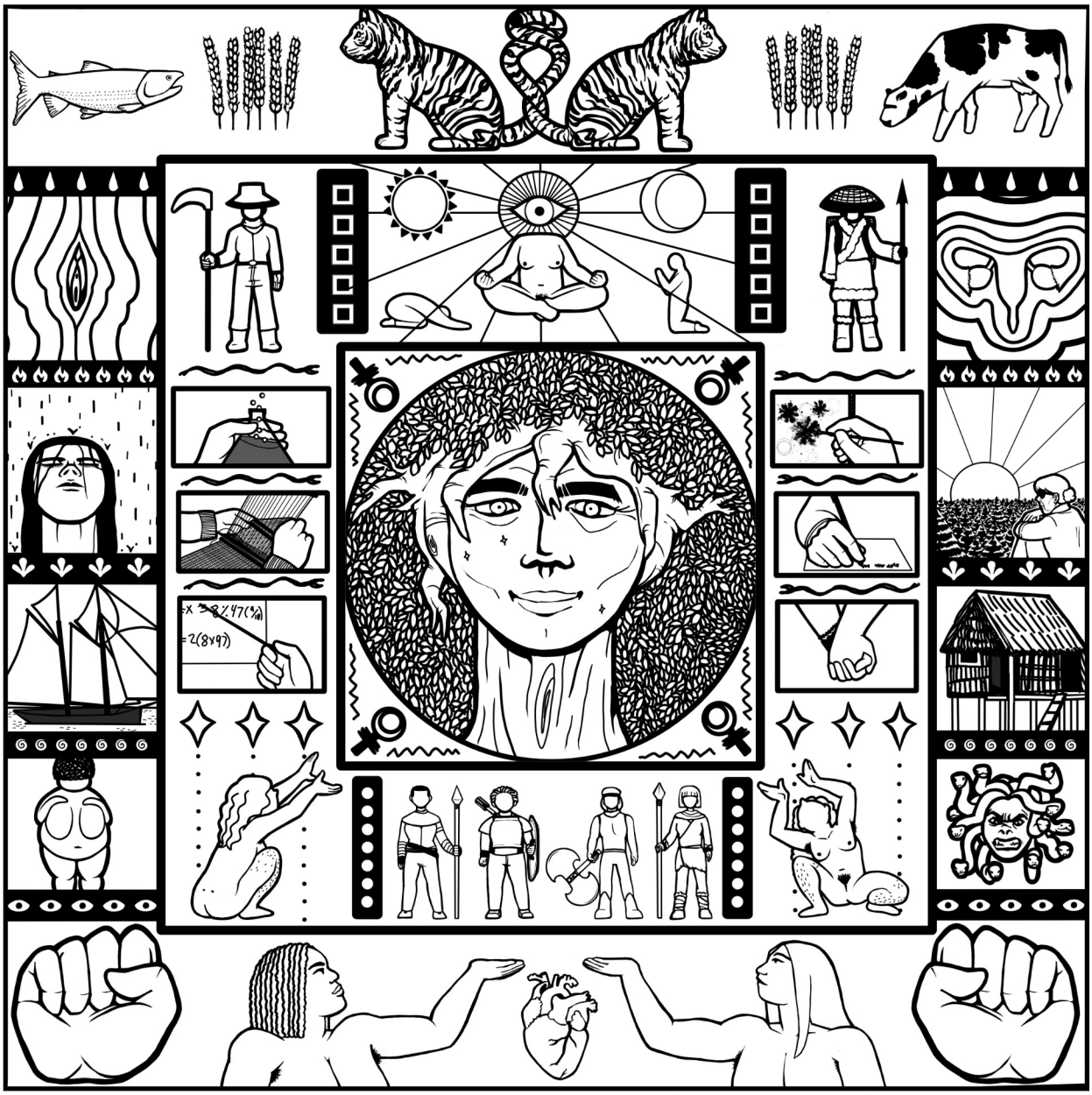
MARCH/APRIL 2025
ISSUE 2

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

VALERIE



In this months issue: SAVE AFGHAN WOMEN: An interview with Afghani women's rights activists / Original poetry by Kitty Robinson, Connelly Pope, Vane Vander, and more/ Film review: L'Une Chante, L'Autre Pas / Female youtubers / SILLYPOO: HOPE FOR WOMEN? / 'On the abandonment of female family history' by Robin G /

Cover Art by A. Britton

You'll notice not all the content in this issue relates directly to women's history. As well as focusing on women's collective past, we want to focus on what that means for women's lives today. The freedom we have today thanks to our foremothers. The freedom we can continue to work towards for the women and girls of tomorrow. We want to celebrate togetherness, grooviness, love and friendship and creativity, despite all adversity.

I want to thank you all again for your continued support and your incredible submissions!! Valerie wouldn't be the same without you.

Yours, Arabella.

illustration from *country women, 1973*

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MAKE SOME NOISE

by Joen

I'm tired of
pretending
like I don't exist
I want to make some noise & be FREE!

SILLYPOO: HOPE FOR WOMEN?

> "Life in a "society" made by and for creatures who, when they are not grim and depressing are utter bores, can only be, when not grim and depressing, an utter bore."
>
> Valerie Solanas, SCUM Manifesto

Editor's note: Sillypoo is two best friends making cartoons together. On International Women's Day 2024, they released CYBERGIRLZ, a story about TOTAL WOMAN VICTORY. On IWD 2025, they released HOOPSKIRT, about a female-only town triumphing over a male invader. This essay is referential mainly of those two works. You can see their work at sillypoo.newsgrounds.com or youtube.com/@Sillypoo - KLR

For fervent lesbian feminists, it's incredibly easy to become incredibly discouraged about the fate of women. We feel that what we want is what's best for women as a whole. At the same time, there is a tremendous ideological gulf separating us from almost every woman alive. Female class solidarity is often strained and fragmented, where it is present at all. Women's oppression is characterized significantly by an emotional experience of captivity and the resulting sense of extreme connectedness to our symbolic (and too often actual) captors (Graham, 1994).

Our movement would not exist if some women did not claw their way towards an autonomous mind, but those who do so often fail to assist others in doing so.

The public imagination most often characterizes female-centered lives as empty. Feminists know that women together are not women alone (Raymond, 1986, p. 3). In the mainstream culture, however, media frequently fails to meet the satirically intended Bechdel test (Bechdel, 1986, p. 22), much less present a positive vision of a world where women who live together occasionally struggle against men, overcome them, and return to enjoying living together.

Many works depicting such a thing are treasured by lesbian feminists, but their obscurity and esoteric perspectives make it difficult to imagine them, for example, changing your coworker's mind about continuing to share a home with someone who sexually violates her. The free state of a woman's mind is radically different from the captive state. We worked to see the world in a way that supports our wellbeing and ability to prioritize one another.

It's difficult and painful for us to enter the mindset of someone who sees the world as a place where she must appease men in order to have a good life. There is a critical dearth of work promoting anything approaching a feminist perspective

with any mainstream appeal whatsoever. We are undeniably bad at this. This is a shame, because the other side is not. They are prolific and effective at distributing materials promoting heterosexualism[i].

Sillypoo is not bad at this. Their visually lavish/immersive/digestible worlds demand that the viewer assumes women together are not women alone. They illustrate the female traits Solanas asserts:

- emotional strength and independence
- forcefulness
- dynamism
- decisiveness
- coolness
- objectivity
- assertiveness
- courage
- integrity
- vitality
- intensity
- depth of character
- grooviness

Their female traits and the power of their connections to one another are immediately evident. Sillypoo's men, in contrast, exemplify the traits Solanas ascribes to them: vanity, frivolity, triviality, and weakness. They are not the point. Women are. Women are hilarious, interesting, competent, and most of all, fun.

Feminists know that experiencing sexism is not fun. We also know that avoiding sexism- that is, spending time with exclusively other women- facilitates the most fun we've ever had. Men and women who identify with them are disgusted by this. Any activity that women stereotypically enjoy doing together is inherently a punchline. From knitting circles to music festivals, whatever we like doing together has a certain taint to it just by virtue of us enjoying doing it together. Women don't hang out because we love doing so. We recreate together as a last resort because we're too gross, boring, or insane to be included in the real spaces, which are mixed-sex. Male supremacist attitudes render the fun we have together incoherent. We struggle to effectively depict the peak social experiences of our lives in a way that has any appeal to uninitiated women to such an extent that often, our efforts to do so can be readily used as negative examples of how repulsive we are.

In Sillypoo's worlds, women groove. From mundane tasks such as browsing for socks to buy online to madcap schemes to send all men (boldly) to war, their technicolor lives together look fun in a way that sidesteps every stereotype about women together. Women together are finally pretty[ii] and fun. Sillypoo also avoids saccharine narratives of simplistic “girl power” – the women in Sillypoo make mistakes, face temporary setbacks, cry out to each other for help or in frustration. But when this happens, they simply get back up and try again.

As much as feminists, lesbians, and lesbian feminists enjoy what we do, our various subcultures are near universally reviled. Gorgeous and gripping work promoting feminist values from women who are not enculturated into any such community[iii] is uniquely positioned to reach the masses.

Right now, liberal "feminism" owns fun. Second wavers are so negative. We hate fun! It's fun to roleplay sexual assault, get cosmetic surgery, do eternal unpaid housework for a man, say yes every time- isn't it?

Well, not if you've ever had fun.

Women don't want their lives to be any more dull or painful. They endorse male values because they believe that doing so will make their life better, and they aren't aware of other ways to have a good life. Sillypoo, for once, successfully conveys how fun it is to be together.

Everybody wants to have fun.

I am not well positioned to create work that overcomes negative perceptions of feminism in order to reach women who would like it if they knew what it actually was. I look like a homophobic caricature and I write theory or, at my most engaging, unmarketable fiction with dark themes. I have not discovered a way to make that magic, but they have. Maybe you could, too. We need to keep trying, and we need to do anything we can to elevate the few voices that do so successfully.

"In actual fact, the female function is explore, discover, invent, solve problems, crack jokes, make music- all with love. In other words, create a magic world." - Valerie Solanas

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[i] Sarah Hoagland coins heterosexualism to describe something beyond "simply a matter of men having procreative sex with women". Heterosexualism describes "an entire way of life promoted and enforced by every formal and informal institution of the fathers' society, from religion to pornography to unpaid housework to medicine...a way of living that normalizes the dominance of one person and the subordination of another." (Hoagland, 1988, p. 7)

[ii] Sillypoo doesn't substantially challenge appearance-based valuation of women, and at times they reinforce it. Being pretty is part of what makes women so great; they assert that certain frequently marginalized women are pretty too, but the meaning and value of women's close attention to maintaining some degree of adherence to certain appearance norms goes mostly unquestioned. Their work is effective specifically because they are not socialized into a deeply feminist subculture. Nothing is perfect; if you'd prefer to wait for effective feminist propagandists who lovingly depict 300-pound snapback lesbians such as myself you're welcome to do so. They convey that women are fun by showing we are pretty. This is offensive but effective. Leaving this sexist norm untouched makes their work much, much more accessible.

[iii] Initially, these artists were enculturated into something else; they were 4chan racists and their older project reflects that. My friend told me after I wrote this. The Sillypoo videos aren't like that and don't link to the old stuff. I would prefer the Sillypoo that had never done this but I'm not aware of them. Condemning their previous views does not necessarily require that we ignore new material promoting values aligning with our own.

Where do we go from here?

Being begins.

Pastry. Gingerbread. Warm, sweet bread. Cinnamon toast poetry. Justice equality higher wages. Independent angel song. It means I can do what I want."

Praise and blessings

Warm and water. Swimming dreams

Gathering HEALING

love-play-dance-swim-fight-flow-struggle-tweek-rub-swirl-stare-castrate-laugh-Masterbait-defend-smooch-smile-win-listen-rap-trip-lick-peek-peak-explode

togetherness

not only is it safer, but its a lot more fun.

pillarsalt on tumblr

The (un)ordinary woman

(after mary dorcey and judy grahn)

arabella

The woman whose husband is dead
The woman with the tattoo
of a bluebird
on her wrist

The woman whose braids
reach her lower back

The woman who braids her hair
swiftly and skilfully
With no wrong moves

The woman who hates her own breasts

The woman who survived breast cancer

The woman who keeps her phone and her wallet
in the pocket of space
in her bra
where her left-breast once was.

The woman who puts things together
The woman who takes things apart

The woman with a three-legged cat
The woman working nights at a call center
The woman up at five in the morning
bottle-feeding a baby goat

The woman married off at twelve
The woman who survived foster care
The woman who survived prostitution
The woman who didn't

The woman who struggles with addiction
The woman who was molested by her father
The woman who chews her own hair
The woman who stopped taking her meds

The woman in the military

The woman who dances
For men
who want to watch women dance

The woman who has to stop crying
Before she returns the floor

The woman who doesn't talk
The woman who talks with her hands

The woman who drinks black coffee and
The woman who can't drink it without cream
And five cubes of sugar

The woman who can't sing
The woman on her smoke break
The woman with three months to live

The woman who pulls her own hair out
The woman who eats her own heart
The woman who tapes down her breasts

The woman who is made of rags
The woman who abandons shame
The woman who was raised by wolves

The woman who bites her nails
The woman who uses both hands
The woman who steals from supermarkets

The woman who doesn’t love her husband
The woman who presses flowers
The woman who forgets to brush her teeth
The woman whose children don't visit her anymore

The woman who sleeps in her car
The woman who has never worn a dress
The woman who hates her boss
The woman who talks to death

The woman who howls
at the moon

I GOT YOU THE THING FROM THE DARK PART OF SPENCER'S

kitty robinson

a thief goes on instinct instead of delight.
hesitation can be her greatest ally. injury
comes too late or not at all, thankfully
the lessons are unlearned. we were born
to be criminals, our first marks the breath
straight out of the womb, still kissed with
the first theft, unchosen. placenta, i could
dryly bite your shoulder when i see the dull
gleam of the rounded mirrors. girls who
steal, girls who can’t help but take the
soap from their best friend's bathroom,
taking only little things from those we love
and on a field trip the hallway of purses
and backpacks and duffel bags like
a neck and a knife for the killer. i'll take
you where ever you want to go. i pay for gas
sin with me, you like the racks at hot topic?
watch this, follow me, i can show you
keep your voice light, stay casual, don't look
just arch your thighs around my thigh.
never feel fear, it's not wrong. girls without
conscience, without care, naked need
giving way to a want that can never be
satisfied. i'll steal you. i'll steal you. remember,
we were happy in our evil. actually, we used
to look straight into the camera and smile.

TEEN MADNESS is Way Existential
try to hide behind a magazine. and
Don't neglect your grab bag
AS You Loot These Essentials
Streetwear for girls with guts, not sluts
MENSTRUAL CRAMPS
Acid witch burning
ANGEL DUST
CRYSTAL CASTLES
Bikini Kill
A really tight pair.
UNSAFE SEX
a bright purple coat VODKA
DIVASECTION
VOMIT
men who set themselves on fire
girls who avoid you
Small-town PRIVILEGE
bad hair days.
Social Contagion
PROMISCUITY
Cross-gender identity
that lasts all day.
IN FOUR YEARS, YOU WON'T RECOGNIZE YOURSELF.
Just don't forget your sense of humor.

“Production/Reproduction"

Plastic people with electric heartbeats
Porcelain veneers bared like fangs
What will they take next?
What will you buy next?
Pretend that it's your choice
You can't bear the alternative
Born and dead in bodybags
Fully realized human capital

RadicalOracle

inspired by the alienation of artificial wombs and female bodies in a predatory society with impossible beauty standards that exploit self-consciousness.

aguas-ucia on tumblr

on the abandonment of female family history (ENG)

robin g.

What do you inherit from the women in your family?
What traditions and female family history does your mother pass on to you?
What do you want to inherit from the women in your family?

Harmful practices should not be passed on, that much is common sense.
But everything else?

-
In many Mexican households women are in charge of passing down religious traditions. There's a decent amount of Mexican Catholics that cannot say the first time they encountered religion, because it has always been around them. They have never known a period of their life where it wasn't.

For me, it started as early as when I was in my mother's womb.

My mother told me about the story of the medallion that sits in our cabinet. The one that has the image of La Virgen De La Caridad Del Cobre*:

"Cuando estaba embarazada contigo me encontré con una Mexicana Cubana. Ella me veía muy triste. Pero yo no veía que me veía triste. Y ella me dijo por qué estás tan triste. Y le dije que perdí a mi bebe anterior. Y dice: “No, no tengas miedo. Ahorita vengo" Y fue a su casa y agarró esa virgencita. Y me la puso en mi estomago: tu niña o niño se va salvar. Vas a ver. Ami me la dio un padre."**

"When I was pregnant with you, I met a Mexican Cuban woman. She felt that I looked very sad. But I did not feel like I looked sad to others. This woman asked me why I was so sad. And I told her it was because I had lost my previous baby. Then she said, "No, no. Don't be so scared! I will be right back!" And she went to her home to grab this Virgencita. She put the medallion on my stomach and said: "Your daughter or son, they will be saved. You will see. This was given to me by a priest."

Setting that aside, after I was born some of my earliest memories were of looking up at the home altar. A statue of La Virgen De Guadalupe**** right next to photos of deceased family members. (My mother is the one I always recall doing the upkeep.)

There's also memories of going to visit family at my father's childhood home where statues of saints decorated every other corner. (This being my paternal grandmother's doing)

So where does all this female family history and traditions leave me and my own beliefs?

When we immigrated to the United States, a lot of my mother's religious practices fell to the wayside. This is a common story among Mexican mothers that move to the states.

In Mexico, a mother has her own mother to rely on, her own sisters that come to her aid. Where a mother may not be on time to pick up her daughter from catechism classes*****, there's always an aunt ready to do so. In coming to a new country, all that support becomes nonexistent. (And in my mother's case she had the added struggle of my father being an atheist who is at best indifferent to religion and at worse viciously mocks her for her beliefs).

And while so many practices fell to the way side there's still things that remain:

Church (although less frequently then it would be in Mexico)
My family's home altar still has La Virgen De Guadalupe statues and saints all over it.
On December 12 the live stream from Basilica de Santa María de Guadalupe where they sing Happy Birthday to La Virgen de Guadalupe plays in the background.
And then there are of course rosaries and even more saint photos and statues scattered around our home.

[But all this is more like trinkets left behind by women that will be soon turned into ruins. It is not the thriving town I know.]

I wonder if that's how my mother feels. To see traditions and rules that were passed down by a grandmother, an aunt, an oldest sister suddenly severed with no certain future.

Well that's all speculation. I do not actually know how much my mother knows about my own personal feelings.

I myself do not feel any particular affection towards religion. However I do enjoy academic research quite a bit, so I have an in-depth understanding of Catholicism both from a theological and secular standpoint. (Just like my maternal grandmother did - my mother says that I would have had endless scholarly discussions had life allowed me to be closer to my maternal grandmother. A Catholic woman that loved to learn about all sorts of topics, my mother said.)

Setting aside scholarly pursuits and the lack of love and belief I have towards religion I still do observe a lot of Catholic and folk Catholic traditions for my mother's sake.

On the other hand, my little sister completely despises religion no matter the angle. She is not even willing to pretend for a moment and it was a battle to get her to start her catechism classes. It makes sense as she did not spend any of her childhood or teenage years in Mexico. But she can carry on my mother's history in a way I cannot.

A lesbian oldest daughter that at face value observes her mother's beliefs but will never have the option to be married in the Church.

A heterosexual youngest daughter who refuses any type of religion on grounds that it is silly and hypocritical but has the option open to marry in the Church.

I wonder how my mother feels about her daughters and the history they will and will not carry on.

As for myself, despite it meaning that there will be a part of my family's female history that will die, I do not feel overly inclined to continue certain practices and beliefs especially ones that have such a patriarchal history. The most I can see myself doing is maybe admiring a saints' statue or two, or the occasional religious artwork. But this is all regarding a future in which my mother is no longer with me.

For now, I do not think of what women’s history I will carry. I live in the present and think of my mother's lonely back in a church pew. I will continue to sit beside her for however many years I’m allowed.

*La Virgen De La Caridad Del Cobre known in English as Our Lady of Charity is one of the Blessed Virgin Mary apparitions. She is said to have appeared in Cuba and is of great importance to Cuban devotees.
**The grammar in the Spanish portion stays as is, as this was transcribed directly from one of our conversations and I wanted to include my mother’s exact words. The English translation has been edited to be more understandable towards English speakers.
***La Virgen De Guadalupe, known in English as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Probably Mexico’s most well known religious image. December 12 commemorates her first apparition in Mexico. Basilica de Santa María de Guadalupe is a Catholic Church in Mexico dedicated to her. Each year on December 12, a huge event is held there and a happy birthday is sung to her. This is live streamed to others in and out of Mexico by various Mexican channels.
*****Catechism classes are religious education classes taken typically in preparation for one of the Catholic sacraments. (Baptism, first communion, ect.)

bre el abandono del historial de las mujeres en mi familia (SPA)

robin g.

¿Qué heredas de las mujeres en tu familia?
¿Qué tradiciones o historial femenina te transmite tu madre?
¿Qué quieres heredar de las mujeres en tu familia?

Las prácticas negativas no deben transmitirse, eso es de sentido común.
¿Pero todo lo demás?

-

En muchos hogares mexicanos las mujeres son las encargadas de transmitir las tradiciones religiosas. Hay una gran cantidad de católicos mexicanos que no pueden decir cuál fue la primera vez que conocieron la religión, porque siempre ha estado a su alrededor. Nunca han conocido un periodo de su vida en el que no estuviera la religión.

En mi caso, empezó cuando estaba en el vientre de mi madre.

Mi madre me contó la historia del medallón que está en nuestro gabinete. El que tiene la imagen de La Virgen De La Caridad Del Cobre*:

"Cuando estaba embarazada contigo me encontré con una Mexicana Cubana. Ella me veía muy triste. Pero yo no veía que me veía triste. Y ella me dijo por qué estás tan triste. Y le dije que perdí a mi bebe anterior. Y dice: “No, no tengas miedo. Ahorita vengo" Y fue a su casa y agarró esa virgencita. Y me la puso en mi estomago: tu niña o niño se va salvar. Vas a ver. Ami me la dio un padre."**

Dejando eso a un lado, después de nacer, algunos de mis primeros recuerdos eran mirando al altar de casa. Una estatua de La Virgen De Guadalupe justo al lado de fotos de familiares fallecidos. (Mi madre es la que siempre recuerdo haciendo el mantenimiento del altar).

También hay recuerdos de ir a visitar a la familia a la casa de infancia de mi padre, donde las estatuas de santos decoraban cada esquina. (Esto era a la dirección de mi abuela paterna).

Entonces, ¿Dónde me deja a mí y a mis creencias toda esta historia y tradiciones de las mujeres en mi familia?

Cuando emigramos a Estados Unidos, muchas de las prácticas religiosas de mi madre se quedaron atrás. Esta es una historia común entre las madres mexicanas que se mudan a los Estados Unidos.

En México, una madre cuenta con su propia madre, con sus propias hermanas que acuden en su ayuda. Donde una madre no llega a tiempo para recoger a su hija de las clases de catequesis, siempre hay una tía dispuesta a hacerlo. Al venir a un nuevo país, todo ese apoyo deja de existir. (Y en el caso de mi madre, tuvo que enfrentarse al problema añadido de que mi padre es ateo y, en el mejor de los casos, se muestra indiferente a la religión y, en el peor, se burla con crueldad de ella por sus creencias).

Y aunque muchas prácticas cayeron en el olvido, todavía hay cosas que permanecen:

Ir a la iglesia (aunque con menos frecuencia de lo que sería en México)
El altar de la casa de mi familia todavía tiene estatuas de la Virgen de Guadalupe y santos por todas partes.
El 12 de diciembre suena de fondo la transmisión en vivo de la Basílica de Santa María de Guadalupe donde le cantan el Feliz Cumpleaños a la Virgen de Guadalupe.
Y luego, por supuesto, hay rosarios y aún más fotos y estatuas de santos esparcidas por nuestra casa.

[Pero todo esto son chucherías dejadas por mujeres que pronto se convertirán en ruinas. No es la ciudad próspera que conozco].

Me pregunto si es así cómo se siente mi madre. Ver tradiciones y reglas que fueron transmitidas por una abuela, una tía, una hermana mayor, de repente cortadas sin un futuro cierto.

Bueno, todo eso es especulación. En realidad no sé cuánto sabe mi madre sobre mis sentimientos personales.

Yo mismo no siento ningún afecto particular hacia la religión. Sin embargo, me gusta bastante lo académico, por lo que conozco a fondo el catolicismo, tanto desde el punto de vista teológico como secular. (Igual que mi abuela materna; mi madre dice que habría tenido interminables discusiones académicas si la vida me hubiera permitido estar más cerca con ella. Una mujer católica a la que le encantaba aprender sobre todo tipo de temas, decía mi madre).

Dejando a un lado lo académico y la falta de amor y creencia que tengo hacia la religión, sigo observando muchas tradiciones católicas y populares católicas por el bien de mi madre.

Por otro lado, mi hermana pequeña desprecia por completo la religión no importa el ángulo. Ni siquiera está dispuesta a fingir por un momento y fue una batalla que empezará sus clases de catecismo. Es lógico, ya que no pasó ni su infancia ni su adolescencia en México. Pero ella puede continuar la historia de mi madre de una manera que yo no puedo.

La primera hija pero lesbiana y que a primera vista observa las creencias de su madre pero que nunca tendrá la opción de casarse por la Iglesia.

La segunda hija que es heterosexual pero rechaza cualquier tipo de religión por considerarla tonta e hipócrita, que tiene abierta la opción de casarse por la Iglesia.

Me pregunto qué pensará mi madre de sus hijas y de la historia que continuarán o no.

En cuanto a mí, a pesar de que significa que una parte del historial de las mujeres en mi familia morirá, no me siento demasiado inclinada a continuar ciertas prácticas y creencias, especialmente las que tienen una historia tan patriarcal. Lo máximo que pienso hacer es admirar una o dos estatuas de santos, o alguna que otra obra de arte religioso. Pero todo esto se refiere a un futuro en el que mi madre ya no esté conmigo.

Por ahora, no pienso en la historia de las mujeres que llevaré conmigo. Vivo en el presente. Pienso en la solitaria espalda de mi madre en un banco en la iglesia. Seguiré sentada me a su lado todos los años que queden.

*La Virgen De La Caridad Del Cobre apareció en Cuba y es de gran importancia para los devotos cubanos.
**La gramática de la parte en español es intencionalmente escrita así como fue transcrita directamente de una conversión con mi madre y quería incluir sus palabras exactas.

L'Une Chante, L'Autre Pas

FANS OF THE *NOUVELLE VAGUE* are likely familiar with the long-debated question: *Godard* or *Truffaut*? but those of us who are enlightened know this question is but a farce... for the true *maître* of the french new wave was not a *maître* at all, but a *maîtresse*: AGNES VARDA!

L'UNE CHANTE, L'AUTRE PAS (*one sings, the other doesn't*), released in 1977, is one of Varda's better known works, and for good reason. while slow and largely sanguine—not unlike the other films of its genre—it absorbs you nonetheless, from the rural commune of Soisson to the arid yet lively streets of Iran. it follows the meeting and subsequent friendship of two women, Pomme (*Apple*) and Suzanne, through snippets of their lives, brief narrations by Varda, and the expansive dialogues shared in postcards.

Pomme is an avant-garde performer and singer, Suzanne is first a mother of two who later goes on to manage a women's reproductive clinic; both are involved in the women's liberation movement. great emphasis is placed on the importance of women's collectivity: each woman monologues separately about the liberatory nature of female friendship and solidarity. while misogyny is certainly touched on—particularly with regard to men who play at feminism to trap women—it is ultimately a minor part of the film, taking a backseat to the ultimate focus on women's inner lives, emotions, identities, and relationships.

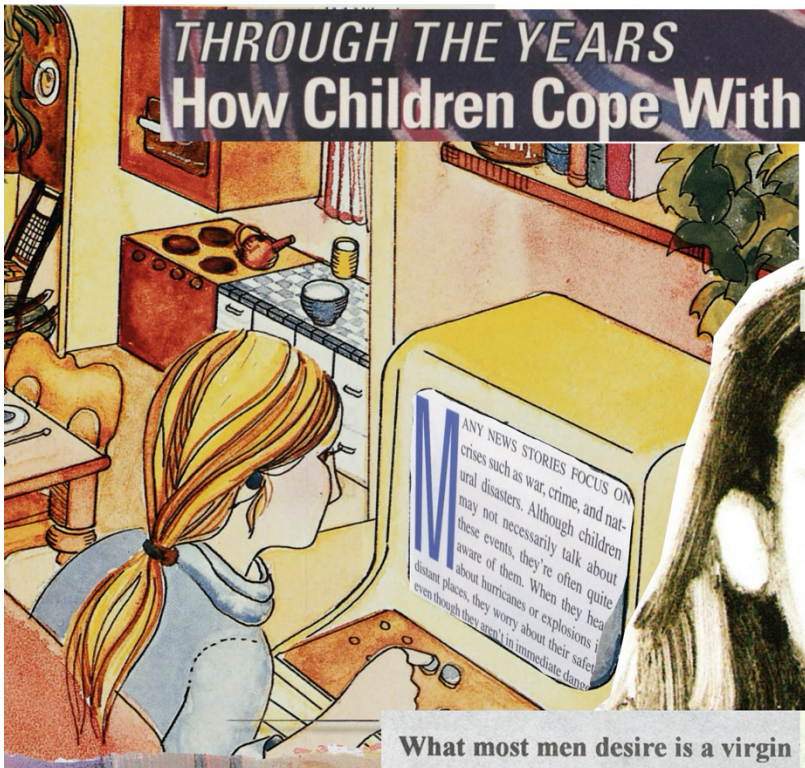
the issue of motherhood and pregnancy is especially central: upon meeting, pomme helps suzanne get an abortion; pomme writes her first song about abortion, among several others regarding pregnancy. whether a feminist vision of motherhood and pregnancy is possible is a problem in radical feminism that is not often discussed except for the purpose of denouncing misogynistic conceptions of motherhood, and speaking out in support of abortion: both valuable causes, of course, particularly as of writing during the Trump administration and the aftermath of Roe v. Wade's death, but it is undeniable that most women are not antinatalists and also that a great many women are mothers, prior to embracing feminism or afterwards. so the question remains unanswered. Varda makes, in my opinion, a solid attempt at answering it in this film.

during a performance of a song about the joys of pregnancy, Pomme (who has had an abortion herself) is criticized by a woman in the audience for endorsing a message which holds anti-abortion sentiments. Pomme responds by asserting that she is not advocating for pregnancy, but simply expressing that pregnant women should "feel things [themselves], and not listen to the church or state." one could call this a liberal or otherwise reductive take on pregnancy, and while i would understand the criticism, i must disagree. where pregnancy is seen as an obligation for a woman, and motherhood the ultimate fate, is it not necessary for feminists to construct a vision of motherhood which assigns it no moral importance, but rather a unique experience of womanhood that one may take how she pleases, when she pleases? is she not permitted to find joy in her embodiment?

perhaps this wanders too close to the meaningless postmodernism of choice feminism—i am emphatically anti-prostitution and the so-called empowering nature of makeup, make no mistake—but i remain optimistic. the advent of pregnancy as morally neutral is necessary to anti-abortion causes, but it is just as important to mothers' welfare causes, which *must* be addressed by radical feminism. mothers are women, and they are no doubt just as subjugated by the current society which takes them to be carrying out an obligation rather than a personal choice, and as such undeserving of support or respect. and unlike prostitution or makeup or cosmetic surgery, pregnancy serves no one, nor does it comply or reinforce oppressive structures of femininity and femaleness. it is a neutral biological function. when we imply that pregnancy is somehow an exception to liberating means of embodiment, we place stigma on women's bodies and biology. is there not something wrong with that picture?

but this question aside, L'UNE CHANTE, L'AUTRE PAS is a celebration of female friendship, collectivity, and solidarity, as well as femaleness itself—insofar as we are women with feelings and thoughts and *interiority* which is so often neglected by cinema. watch this film and let your fellow woman speak.

THROUGH THE YEARS
How Children Cope With Fear



She was in the Big Apple all of four days when she was abducted by four men;

doesn't she know to stay home?

women should be seen and not heard.

worse, as Roy began to sexually molest his 13-year-old daughter Bettie, stopping just short of intercourse so as to avoid another embarrassing teen pregnancy. When the naive girl finally realized what the scumbag was doing to her, she hated him for it. She knew that

she said a taxi driver beat her up and raped her, throwing her out of his car.

What most men desire is a virgin

who was shot & killed

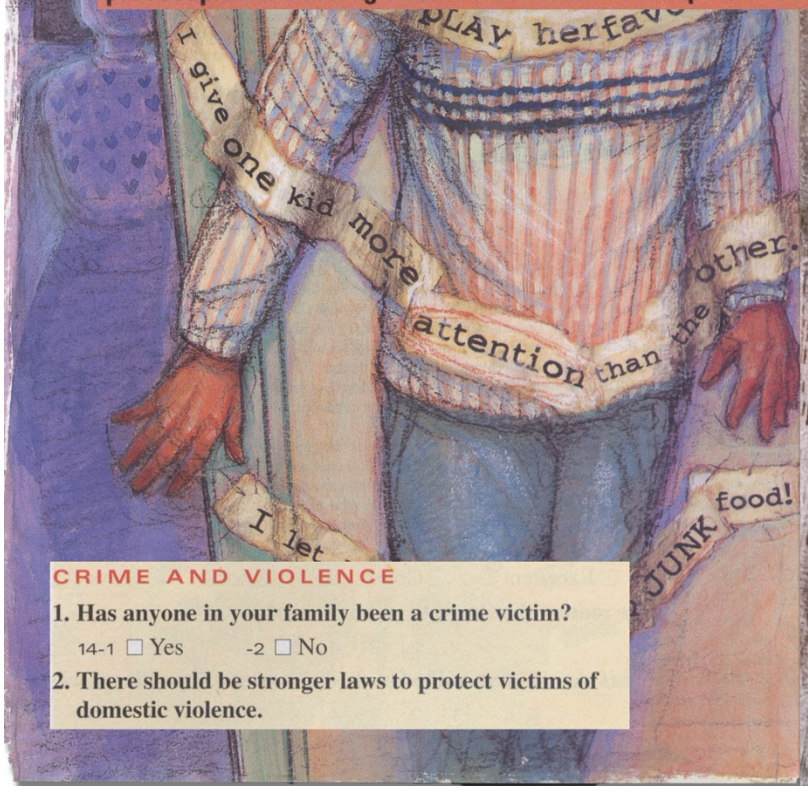
I weigh _____ pounds; I want to weigh_____
These are the parts of my body that I want to change:
Check as many as you want:

☐ Face	☐ Arms	☐ Hips
☐ Neck	☐ Waist	☐ Thighs
☐ Chest	☐ Butt	☐ Legs

PLEASE HELP ME AT ONCE...IN NEED..

Six- to eleven-year-olds understand enough to realize that the world can be a scary place. Five- and six-year-olds may become preoccupied with thoughts about the death of their parents.

rape, beatings, murder,



'I shot her...
yeah
I shot her...'

IT ALWAYS HAPPENS!

CRIME AND VIOLENCE

1. Has anyone in your family been a crime victim?
   14-1 ☐ Yes -2 ☐ No
2. There should be stronger laws to protect victims of domestic violence.

When I was one, in ninety-four, a Texas man broke down a door,
She had no time to beg or cry, her eyes remained sealed shut and dry
A jealous ex, a borrowed gun
Became her end, when I was one.

When I was two, and growing fast, I saw my mother stare, aghast,
'In his flat,' the newsman said, ' All sexual assaults, all dead.'
Could have been any girl, she knew
And turned it off, when I was two.

When I was five I learnt to read, and looked at books with much intrigue.
I flicked through 'British History', and saw no-one who looked like me.
None were girls—we'd been deprived—
I trudged on home, so sad for five.

When I was eight, my chest was growing—I crossed my arms to stop it showing.
But still, the boys all grabbed and stared, and I retreated, ever scared.
My teacher blamed my changing state,
And so I wept, alone and eight.

When we were ten, my friend left school—in her family that was the rule.
She said they'd cut her down below, and I was scared to see her go.
She had a future husband then,
And he was old, and she was ten.

When I was twelve, unsure and small, I turned my head and heard him call,
'Hey—Nice tits! Hey, come here, you!' I ran, Dad said, 'It's what men do.'
He said they could not help themselves
I pooled with guilt; I was just twelve.

At age sixteen my friend kissed me—things swam to focus, finally.
The boys I knew said it was 'hot', to scald our cheeks for daring not
To like or fuck them—so obscene,
We burnt with rage. We were sixteen.

When I was twenty-two, I walked, alone from work, and I was stalked.
'Take off your skirt, you fucking dyke. Here's a lesson you won't like.'
They left me bleeding, black and blue,
Destroyed
And dying
Twenty-two.

"I-piss-bubbles" on tumblr.

SPUN SILK:

While my great grandmother, Joycelyn (See previous page) has long since passed, she was a prolific writer in her day, frequently writing into magazines and newsletters in-between raising her three daughters. A few years ago, my mother took the time to compile all of her published writing, putting it all together in a document that is almost 200 pages long and spans over three decades of her work. For this issue on women's history, I would like to share a few pieces of her writing with *Valerie* readers.

Arabella

"Teachers Lesson"
Originally published in 1953
in New Zealand Woman's Weekly

'Snifty's amusing tale of the teacher who caught on fire reminded me of an almost forgotten episode of my school days. It was a small country school I attended with a very high stud and very draughty doors, so in winter it was anything but warm. There was a small stove used for warming the room and boiling water for our mid-day cup of cocoa. The teacher was a lady of broad proportions, who was at times (with good reason, no doubt) loud of voice, sarcastic and irritable. One cold, frosty morning teacher was in a truly bad mood, none of us escaping the brunt of her tongue, and the only thing that kept us warm was our agility in dodging chalk which she hurled at us from time to time from her stance right in front of the little stove. Just when, smarting from cold and the bite of teachers tongue we were all beginning to think childhood was the worst time in our lives, an ominous scorching smell pervaded the room. Teacher's temper was pretty hot, but surely it wasn't actually scorching! Then "Oh!" screamed the teacher, jumping smartly away from the roaring fire with both hands over her posterior. There was our teacher well and truly on fire. Her smock had a big round hole burnt in it by the time the little blaze was extinguished.

It is significant to note that thenceforward the warmth of the stove was left unobstructed to be shared and appreciated by all. – J.B.J

"That Jargon!"
Originally published in April 1962
in New Zealand Farmers' Weekly

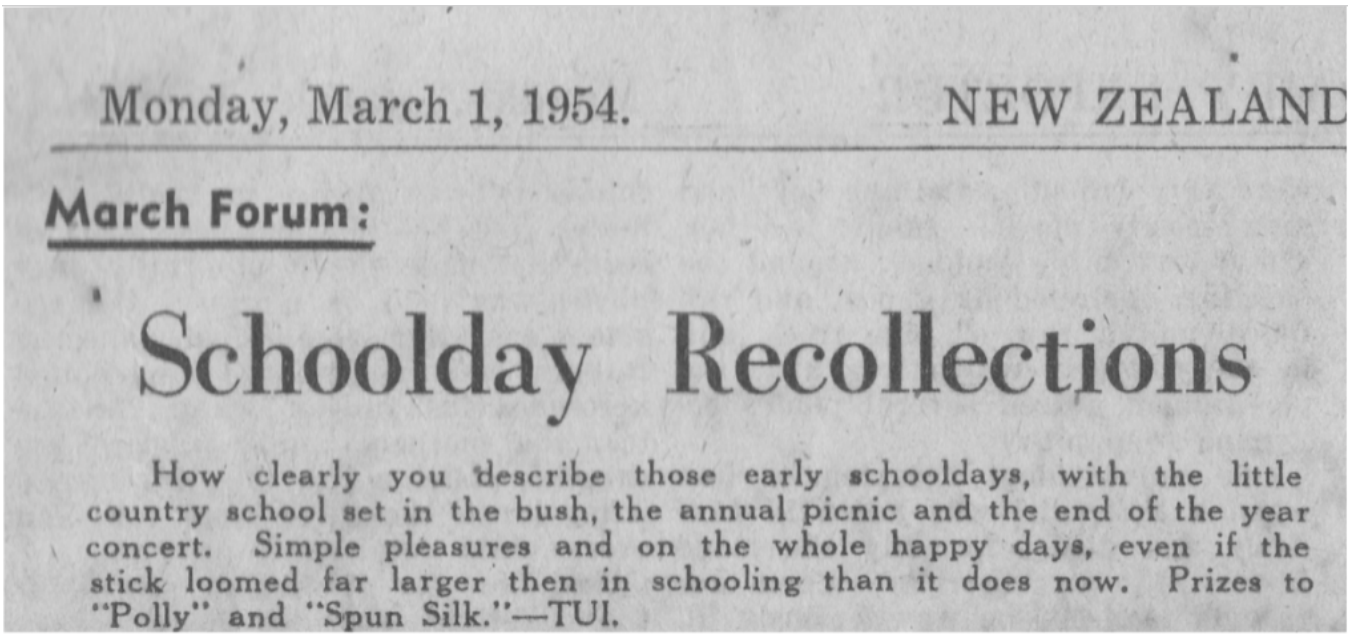
This modern jargon! Sitting outside in the cool of the evening in the motor camp while on holiday, I heard the following one-sided conversation from a woman who alighted from a car: "I'll say. Yeah. You're telling me. OK. See yah." I wondered if the person she was answering spoke the same language. This sort of thing creeps in so easily though. It's in my own home. I had bought myself a new dress length, a drip-dry cotton, crisply blue and white and quite different from what I usually wear. I thought it would make a smart casual frock. Draping the material in front of me I walked into the room where my daughters, twelve, nine and six, were quietly absorbed in reading and painting, and surprised them by saying, "Girls, what do you think of my new dress?" They all looked up, smiled obvious instant approval. "Real cool," said twelve years. "Real neat," said nine years. "Faberlious" lisped Miss Six, not to be outdone and using to the best of her ability that adjective so famous and over-used these days.
– Chain (Cambridge)

"Schoolday Recollections"
Originally published on 1 March 1954
in New Zealand Dairy Exporter

I remember sweltering in summer as we trudged the dusty white mile and a half to and from the little box-like building that was our school, and picking blackberries white with dust but devouring them with relish (and with bugs included more often than not!). I can't remember shivering much in winter's cold and rain, probably because the young are too healthily energetic to let the cold probe in. I remember the clamour in our house when it came eight o'clock and mother did not have us quite ready for school. We all had a horror of being late but of course we never were. The pre-exam anxiety is as vivid now as then; likewise the joyous feeling of relief and release once results were known. The squabbles and the teasing, the friendships, the laughter and the tears. All went with me through the school days. The turnip patch which practically every child raided bar myself—until—at long last I too yielded unto temptation and then as now, I seemed to find I couldn't get away with sin. Yes, we were caught the next day and I still remember my shame as I was lined up among the culprits. Then as now too, I worried a lot; I know now more than half of it was unnecessary but I had a dread of being a failure and I toiled and studied as if my life depended on it. Alas I ruefully admit a lot I learned is forgotten, but I have not forgotten how I hated arithmetic and loved English. Essay time I was in my glory, sums in the depths of despair.

Well, looking back, then peering closely into my present adult life 21 years since I tearfully bade school days goodbye I find that inside I'm much the same queer anxious creature as I was when I was a school girl in the long, long ago!

– Prize to Spun Silk

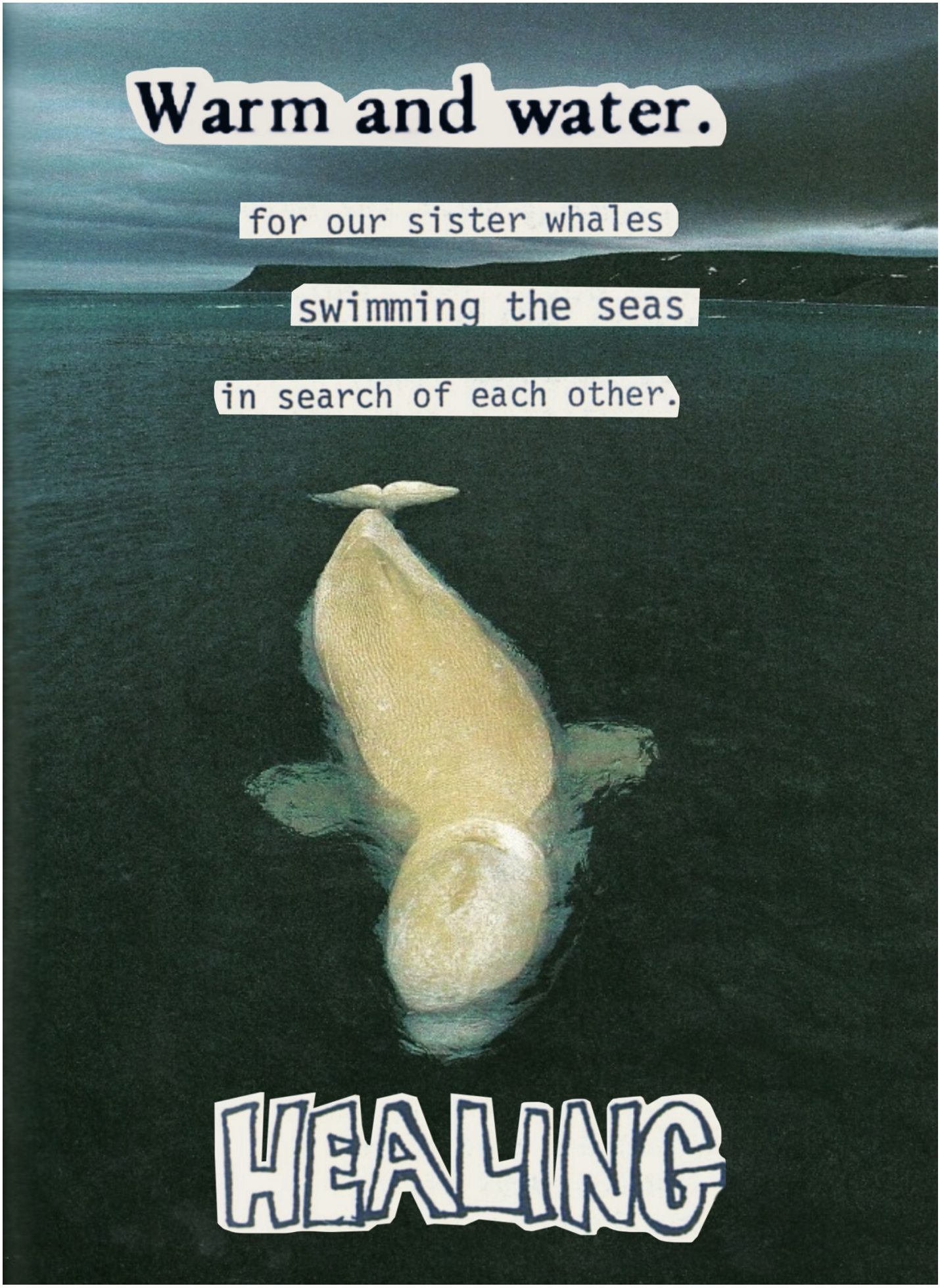


Monday, March 1, 1954. NEW ZEALAND

March Forum:

Schoolday Recollections

How clearly you describe those early schooldays, with the little country school set in the bush, the annual picnic and the end of the year concert. Simple pleasures and on the whole happy days, even if the stick loomed far larger then in schooling than it does now. Prizes to "Polly" and "Spun Silk."—TUI.


Warm and water.
for our sister whales
swimming the seas
in search of each other.
HEALING

A Word with the Aunties

Conelly Pope

I regularly write to my Aunties.
They live far away.
Imagine two ladies of a certain age,
Well-dressed, with coiffed dark hair.
Imagine Auntie Reese with a cigarette,
Wearing red with a white collar, amber jewelry;
Auntie Bell wears jade green
With cat's eye glasses
And holds a whiskey highball.
They're not good at using Zoom,
So we swap notes over email.
My first email reads:
Hi Aunties, how are you?
I am embarking on a quest
To find the Goddess!
The Goddess speaks in many languages,
Now I need to find MINE.
One place to start, I think,
Is the path of my ancestors.
I can trace myself to
Lebanon on my mother's side,
Ireland on my father's side.
Aunties, surely you can guide me.
The goddesses of my ancestors.
Who are they?
Auntie Reese writes back to say,
What, like pagan goddesses?
I don't have anything to do with them.
I elaborate:
Did you ever wonder—
Before we met that carpenter-preacher,
Who our people were? The Lebanese?
We might have been Jewish,
We might have honored Phoenician gods—
Which of the Gospels was written for us?
Or did we love Ashtart, the star above the sea?
Auntie Reese replies:
You just got that name from a website. Our ancestors were converted
by Jesus Christ Himself. It's a great honor,
so claim it. Before that we were lost,
Blinded, doomed. Kneeling before
Stone idols. Why go back to that?
Fortunately, I am the patient type.
Phoenicians invented the alphabet,
Can't we give them some credit?
I can hear her scoffing.
Oh, the alphabet.
Look, you got an education, honey,
Leaps and bounds past what I got.
You just put your brains to good use,
And let that be the legacy. Alright?
Auntie Bell's reply comes an hour later.
My dear, she writes,
We are Catholics all the way back,
as far back as anyone cares to count,
my people and Reese's folk.
And our concern has been survival,
Not the spiritual.
I write back to her, *Auntie, Auntie, Auntie,*
Can you please tell me of my Irish forebears?
Did I come from a line of cunning women?
Did my great-grandmother journey
To the holy wells of St. Brigid
On reverent pilgrimage?
Auntie Bell writes back and says
There's no one left to tell you.
Sometimes knowledge really is lost.
But dear, if you're so intent
On finding answers in the distant past,
Make it a story that you tell yourself.
Say "once upon a time" and carry on.
I say, *But the truth is valuable to me.*
Auntie Bell writes back, *Here is the truth: your ancestor,*
A girl of fourteen years,
Departed Knockainey all alone.
She crossed the Atlantic,
And in the confusion and noise of America
She survived, and made her way.
You are a child of her courage.
Why ask permission from your godmothers?
From where we are,
We have a new perspective on things,
Plenty to see, lots to learn.
We hope to see you doing the same.
Auntie Reese always likes to have the last word.
Yes! Exactly, she writes.
You have plenty else to worry about
Than a bunch of musty old texts.
Remember to moisturize, honey.
I sigh, I smile, I close up my mail.
I remember my Aunties,
I wonder if they can see me now.
The vapor from my coffee cup
Arises like incense smoke.
Outside, the acacia tree
Offers peridot seeds to the sun.

"that one overused quote by bell hooks"

Vane Vander
mayvaneday.org

Lethe, I've been trying to communicate
as best as I goddamn can
because not even the famed Lenormand
cards give me of concepts a wide enough range:

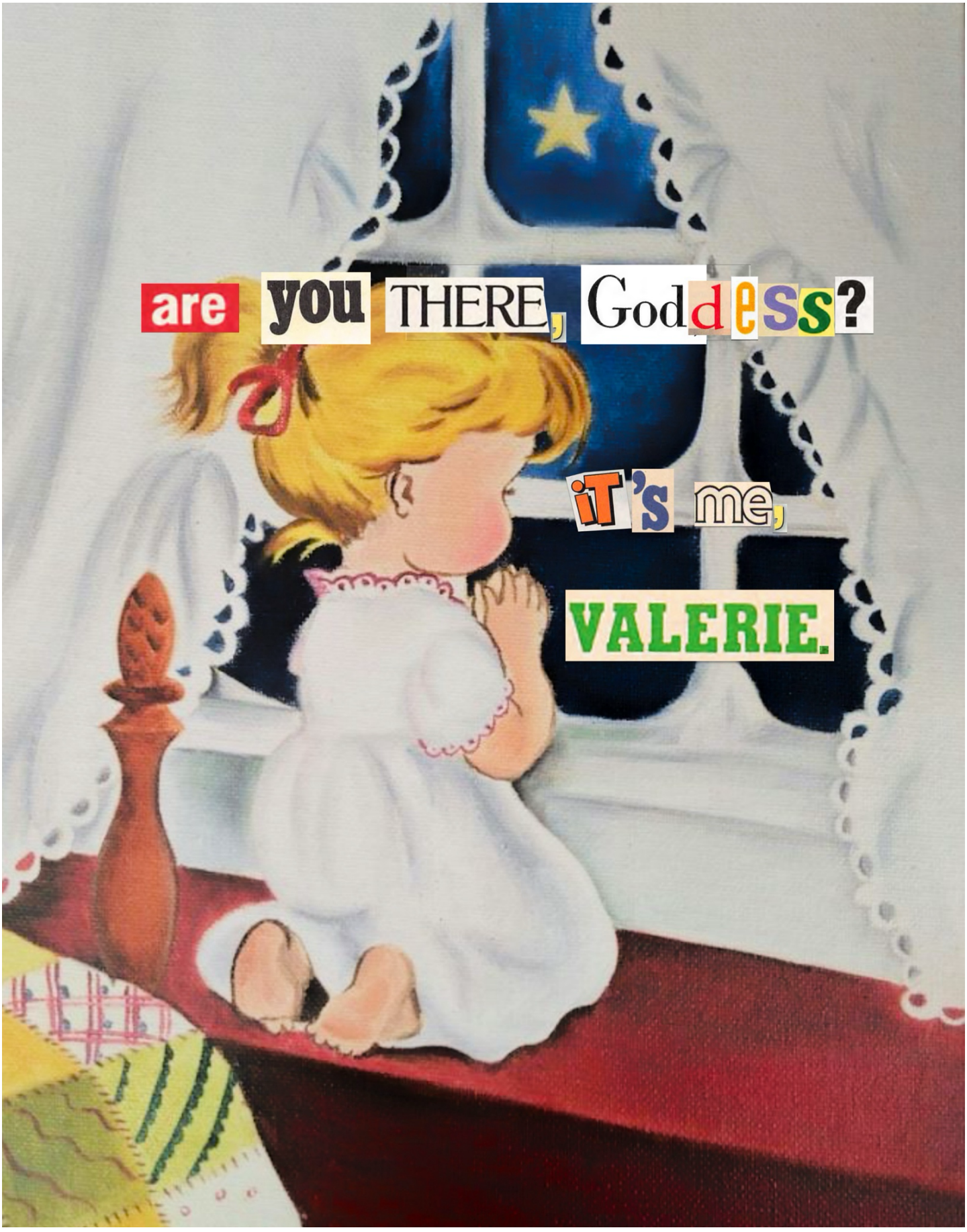
You need to cast aside
your guilt and write.
You need to stop wishing
the well of creativity would run dry
so you can lay down your armor
and in obscurity die.
Your whole existence
inherently stands in opposition
to those would see the world of colors bled dry.
No amount of silence will buy
mercy from their genocide.
And a life spent prostrated
isn't a life worth living.

You need to stop fearing
punishment from merely breathing
and a loss of life from exposure to criticism.
Lethe, you wanna know a secret about fascism?
It's inherently unsustainable. It cannot create
anything on its own. It has to steal, has to corrupt,
can only criticize, appropriate, misinterpret, hate.
You have what no one else possesses: a world born from your veins
with intention not to overlord
but to coexist in love.
Don't tell me
you seriously believe
you think the suffering will cease
once you've negated yourself to a simple steady hum?

"Which is it, Lethe?
A memory, or me?"
Damn, I sound like an answering machine.
"We're calling about your car's extended warranty."
Hang up. I can't afford a car.
Never have.
Can't pay for the repairs or the insurance tax.
Why be restrained to a car
when these wings you've fixed for me go where I desire?

Why carry you this far if you'll just return to the funeral pyre?

Lethe, I'm not angry. I'm just exasperated
because you see a storm and you choose not to face it
with eyes open wide
and wings tucked in tight
but to conceal this, your legacy, and cower down and hide.
I understand your reasoning, Lethe, I really do.
It's not easy to overcome two decades of emotional abuse
or the anxiety of running against the grain of the zeitgeist
and losing your employment and watching your money run dry.
But I know you have the strength.
Because you have part of my soul and the knowledge
that ever since
we reunited, you've never been alone.
Stand up, Lethe. Put on your poncho.
Take my hand. I know it's cold
and this is a heavy sticky heat,
but this is *nothing*
compared to what you'll face in Sablade,
and you might as well get some practice in as Adversary.


are you THERE, Goddess?
iT's me,
VALERIE.

we have very different ideas
and our differences makes us stronger

what we've been…

reading

Secret Hearts by *Radclyffe*

I have recently started listening to the audiobooks of Radclyffe on long drives. She's a romance author and writes the kind of cutesy, clichéd romance novels that seem to be so abundant for heteros but hard to find for lesbians. This is by no means a criticism- we need our escapist fluff just as much as everyone else! Not to say there's nothing of substance in this book. Far from it, her characters deal with complex and relevant topics such as grief, addiction, immigration issues, health struggles and more. Her characters are strong, capable women who have some special area of expertise - in this book there's an avid gardener and a talented butch engineer that find themselves falling for one another in an unlikely circumstance. The writing can be a little bit cringey, but it's all in good fun. Her sex scenes are really good as well! If you're looking for a novel to take your mind off things and cheer you up, I would highly recommend 'Secret Hearts' to do just that.
Review by I-piss-bubbles on tumblr.

"Daughters of Shandong" by Eve J. Chung

is a book based on the story of the author's grandmother and her experiences during the Chinese Civil War. Hai, her mother, and two younger sisters are left behind by their extended family when the Communist Army takes over Shandong and the book follows their thousand-mile journey to Taiwan in the aftermath. They walk over six hundred miles, find a way to make a living wherever they go, and finally reunite with the family that tried to be rid of them at every opportunity--but the journey has changed them all, and they refuse to be treated the same as they were in Shandong. The author has written an article on mourning for her family in the present and the way that patriarchal religion has tried to keep the women of her family separated--"Eternal Solace: Eve J. Chung on Tradition, Family and Mourning in Taiwan."
Review by Brianna B.

watching

The Peasants (2023),

based on the 1924 Nobel-winning book of the same name, tells the story of Jagna. She's a young woman in nineteenth century rural Poland, and although the people in town believes she's pampered and promiscuous, she's married off to the richest farmer in the village--despite being involved with his son. Over the course of a year, there are personal and political issues that cause problems for the entire town, and as things get worse, everyone has found an easy target to blame. Jagna's story is told entirely in oil paintings that emphasize both the beauty of the countryside and the horrors that Jagna go through.
Review by Brianna B

listening to

Beats and Breaks from the Flower Patch - Kitty Craft
Just Another Diamond Day - Vashti Bunyan
Spit - Kittie

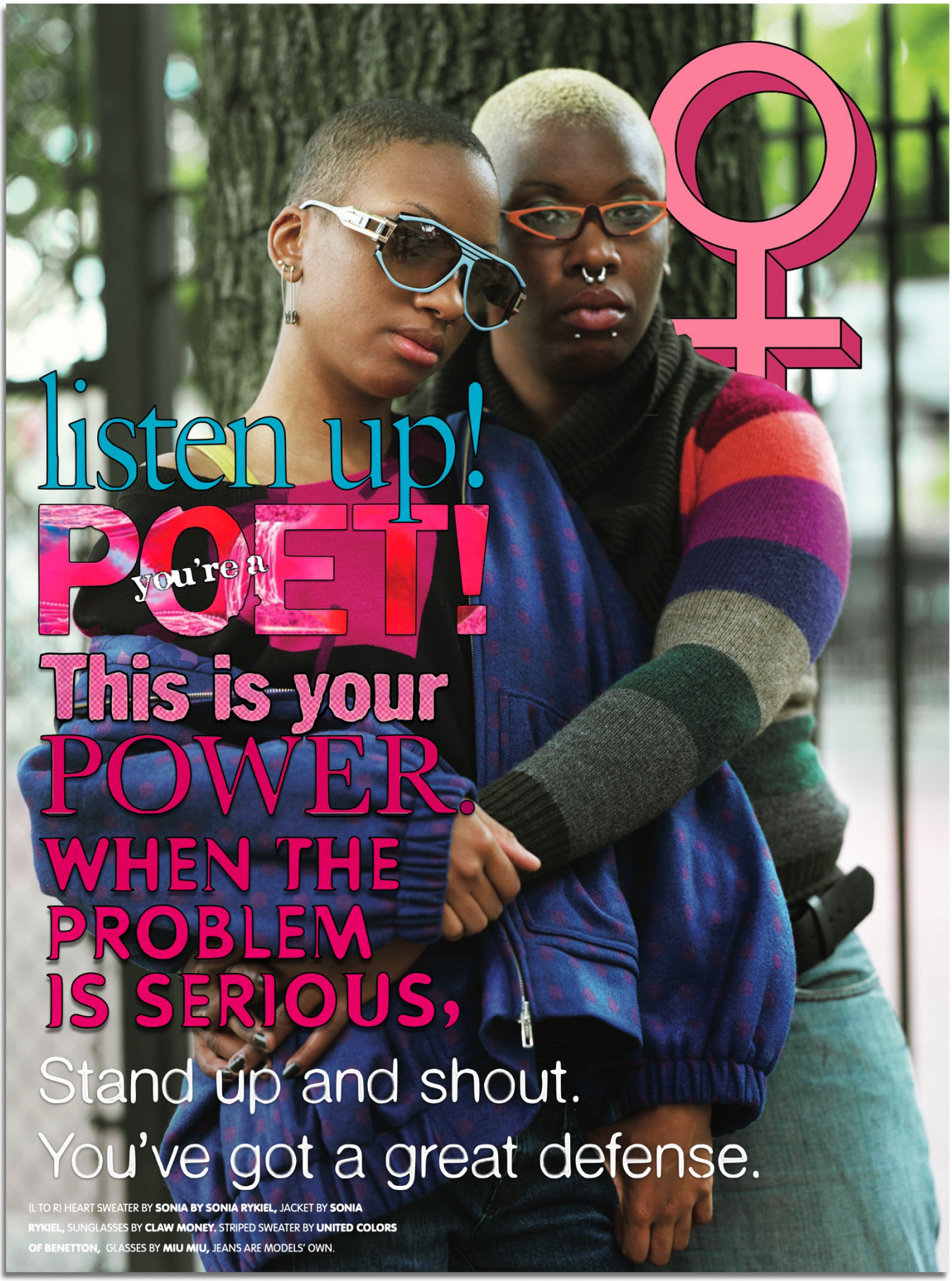
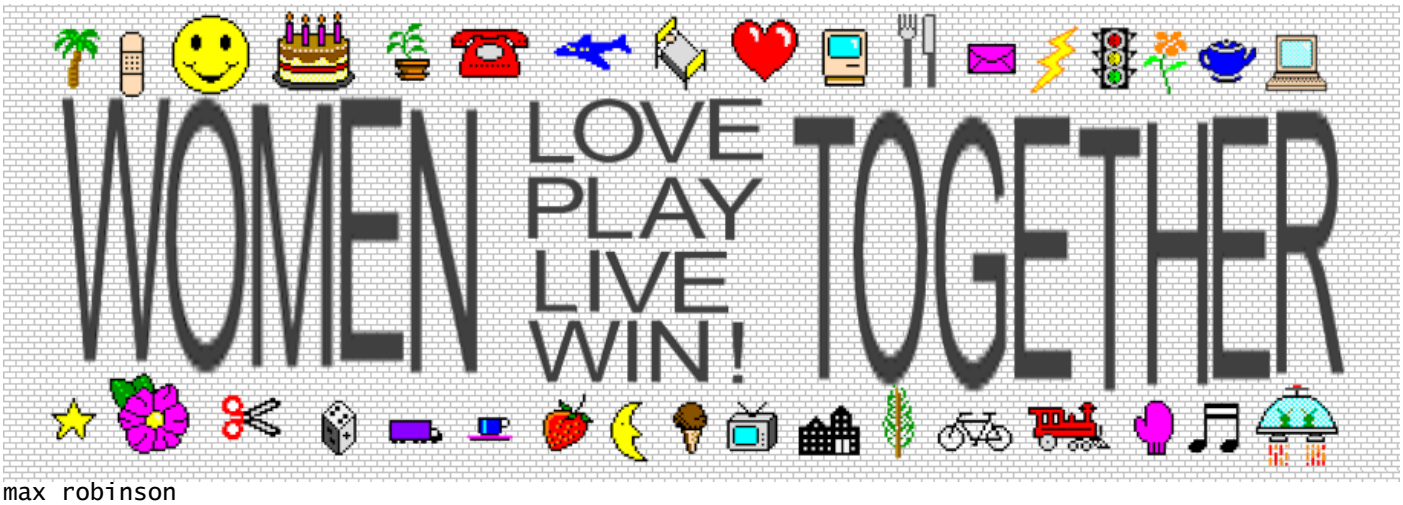


image from miss behave magazine, issue 5 (2007) photos by vincent skeltis. style by kristina dechter. collage details added in post by Valerie.



max robinson

Female Youtube Creators we're loving

FEMINISM:

Max Dashu

Founded Suppressed Histories Archives back in 1970, and is still to this day educating people on women's history and prehistory.

Feminist Vhs Archive

Uploads archived feminist VHS recordings from the 70s and 80s.

ChannelWorldBluez

Is a detransitioned woman who makes videos about radical feminism, transition and detransition, and misogyny, as well as vlogs and 'storytime' content.

RunawaySiren940

Made thoroughly researched videos about feminism, modern LGBT culture, and misogyny in the trans movement.

Gnc Centric

Livestreams on youtube, reading and discussing feminist books, as well as live reacting to news and interviews regarding women's rights.

SourPatches2077

Is a detransitioned butch lesbian who has made many videos about feminism, lesbian culture, transition, and misogyny, as well as interviewing other detransitioners and feminists and sharing their perspectives.

D.I.Y:

Laura Kampf

Travels, trashpicks, makes her own D.I.Y upcycled furniture, and works on renovating her 120 year old house!

Seejanedrill

Makes videos helping people do D.I.Y home improvement and repairs on a budget!

Pottery To The People

Is a potter living in Germany who makes tutorial videos on both throwing and handbuilding, as well as videos of her creating awesome things out of clay.

GET HANDS DIRTY...

makes content inspiring women to work with their hands and build stuff from scratch! She's documented the process of custom-building furniture for her tiny apartment, and shows us how she builds loft beds, cabinets, or tables, as well as making her own hydraulic press, installing ceramic tiles, and making a sanding belt.

Simone Giertz

Invents and builds awesome contraptions, including a foldable coathanger, a robot made out of stained glass, a plant chandelier ("Aka a plamp") and an exoskeleton and electric skateboard for her three legged dog.

SCIENCE + ANIMALS

Lindsay Nikole

Makes fun, engaging videos on science, nature, and prehistoric animals.

Up and Atom

Makes videos on physics, mathematics, and famous paradoxes.

Animalogic

A show on YouTube that is hosted by five different women passionate about all things science, Animalogic talks about all sorts of weird and wonderful animals!

KPassionate

Is a marine biologist who makes videos about breaking ocean news, explains the science behind viral animal videos, and educates people on how to spot fake animal rescue channels.

Tibees

Makes videos about physics, maths, astronomy, and the history of science.

Dani Connor Wild

Is a wildlife photographer who rescues and rehabilitates baby squirrels!

Kitten Lady

Makes videos about kitten rescue, fostering, and dealing with sick or immunocompromised rescue animals. She also fosters puppies!

COOKING:

SouthernFrugalMomma

makes videos on grocery shopping on a budget, trying "struggle meals" from around the world, and making cheap, tasty dinners for her family.

Care Free Living

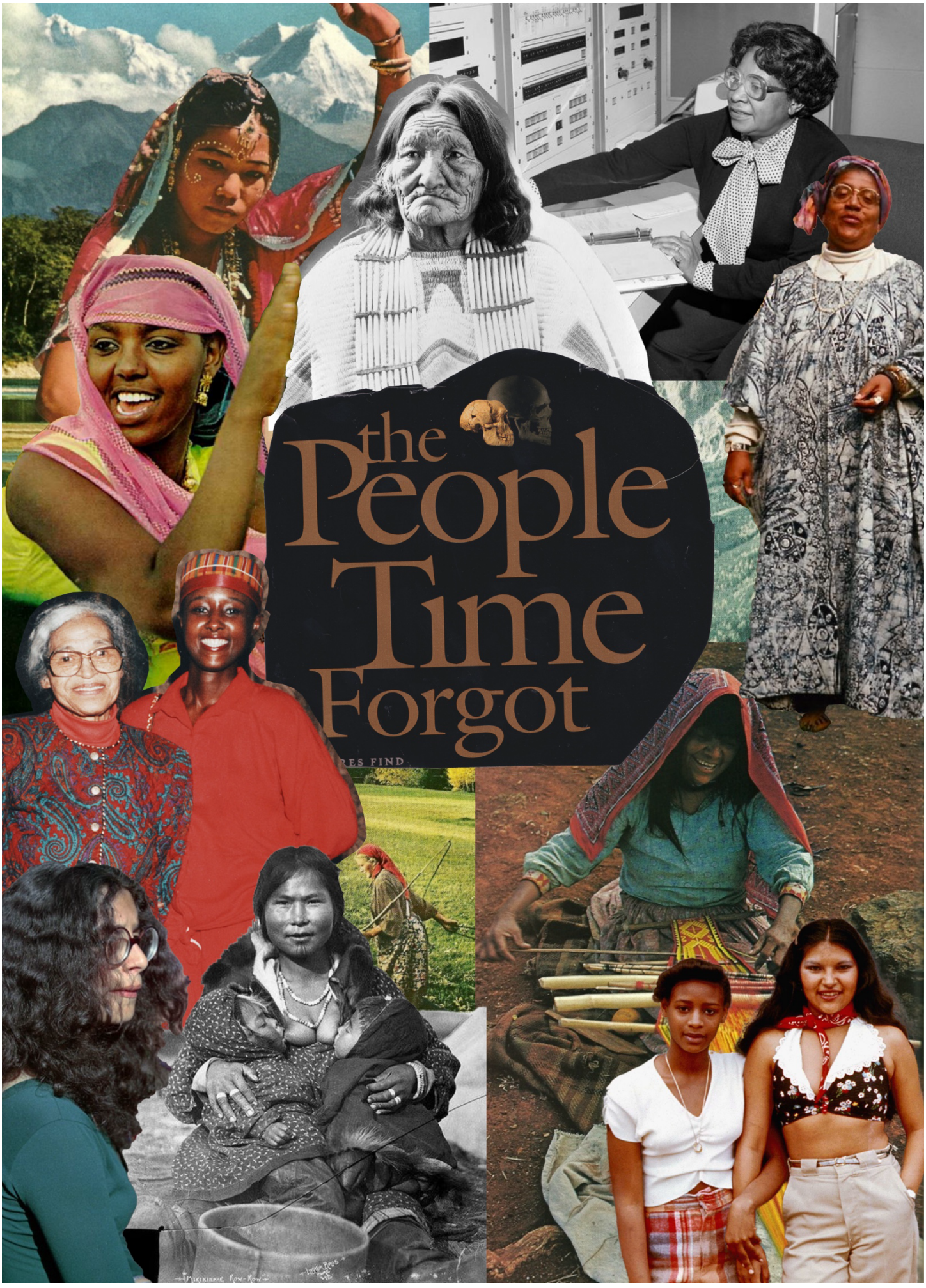
Lives in an old trailer, and makes videos about everyday frugal living - aquiring ingredients from food pantrys and dumpster diving, she makes beautiful meals from them.

How To Cook That

Makes videos debunking fake/clickbait recipes online, does "Cake Rescue," criticises fast food advertising, and talks about what people ate hundreds of years ago.

Mary's Test Kitchen

Experiments with plant based ingredients to make vegan and keto recipes, and has a series called "Will It Tofu?"


the People Time Forgot

SAVE AFGHAN WOMEN

On the 31st of March, Pakistan is deporting Afghan refugees en masse. Among them are 60 activists who advocated for the rights of women and children. Women who were forced to evacuate Afghanistan due to the Taliban's regime, are now being forcibly deported.

"Sending activists back to Afghanistan, where they are very likely to be subjected to torture at the hands of the Taliban regime, would put them in greater risk," Osama Malik, a refugee lawyer in Islamabad, told DW - Deutsche Welle, Germany's international media outlet for unbiased news.

Qaiser Khan Afridi, spokesperson for the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees) in Pakistan, said the agency was worried about the deportations.

"UNHCR is especially concerned for Afghans who face a risk of harm upon return, such as ethnic and religious minorities, single women, journalists, human rights activists, and members of artistic professions like musicians. In view of these mounting challenges, UNHCR urged Pakistan to continue to provide safety to Afghans at risk, irrespective of their documentation status," said Afridi.

A Change.org petition created by Dutch activist Nadja Muller reads:

On March 31, 2025, the Pakistani government is set for a mass deportation of Afghan people back to Afghanistan. Amongst them are 60 Afghan women, women rights defenders and their families, which face imprisonment, torture, and execution under the Taliban regime.

These women fought for their freedom. Now, they are running for their lives. If we don't act, they will be deported into the hands of their oppressors.

*These women are **human rights activists, defenders of women's rights, and the future leaders** of Afghanistan. They are determined to rebuild their country once Afghanistan is free from the Taliban. But if we do not act now, there will be no future for them.*
Why these women need protection:
*- **Two-thirds have been arrested, tortured, or raped** by the Taliban for their activism.*
*- Deportation from Pakistan means certain **death or lifelong oppression** for them.*
*- They are currently enrolled in a **personal leadership program run by HeartWork** (heartwork.earth), preparing them to rebuild Afghanistan's future.*

*They are under **daily threat**—even in Pakistan. Police harassment and targeted raids are intensifying. Just this week, police raided homes where Afghan refugees were staying, including women and children. One of the husbands of the women in our group was arrested again, threatened with deportation, and only released after a letter of protection was handed over—along with a bribe. Others were not so lucky: families have been left on the streets with children in the dark. Videos of the latest raids came through on New Year's Day. And one family has already been deported back to Afghanistan, facing direct threats from the Taliban.*

Who are these women and women rights defenders?

Zahra was a teacher and a women's rights activist. In Kabul, she organized protests under the slogan "Bread, Work, and Freedom." The Taliban did not tolerate dissent and identified her as a threat. During a protest, she was arrested, tortured, and brutally beaten, suffering severe spinal and eye injuries. After her release, she received repeated threats, her home was monitored, and her family was pressured to silence her. The Taliban has spread her name and photo at border checkpoints, ensuring she will be captured if deported.

*She is not alone. **Fariba**, another activist, was abducted in 2023 and repeatedly tortured and raped while in Taliban custody. The Taliban tried to break her, but she refused to give up her fight for freedom. Thanks to international pressure, she was eventually released and fled to Pakistan. But even there, she remains unsafe. Taliban operatives in Pakistan continue to threaten her life.*

For these women, silence is not an option. They are the future of Afghanistan. Despite their trauma, they continue to organize protests, publish statements, and raise global awareness of the horrors faced by women in their country. They dream of returning to a free Afghanistan, where they can help rebuild their homeland. But without our help, that future will never come."

Returning to their homeland is literally a death sentence, because they will be tortured and sentenced to death or imprisonment. Since the Taliban returned to power, many women's rights activists have been arrested, tortured and sexually abused in prison simply for standing up for their basic rights. These acts of cruelty are intended to instill fear and silence those who dare to speak out. Just this week, police raided homes where Afghan refugees were staying, including women and children. One of the husbands of the women in our group was arrested again, threatened with deportation, and only released after a letter of protection was handed over—along with a bribe. Others were not so lucky: families have been left on the streets with children in the dark. Videos of the latest raids came through on New Year's Day. And one family has already been deported back to Afghanistan, facing direct threats from the Taliban.

Thanks to activists all over the world, Valerie has access to information on this, and permission to help spread the word by sharing the English translation of an interview with some of Afghan women's rights activists currently residing in Pakistan. The rest of this issue will be devoted to said interview. Please, take the time to read it.

“WE HAD NO CHOICE but to fight”

"War Does Not Have a Woman’s Face" is the title of a book by Svetlana Alexievich that contradicts its content. The book tells the stories of heroic deeds by women who fought and saved lives on the battlefield at the cost of their own.

War does not have a woman’s face, yet women are blamed for wars. War does not have a woman’s face, yet women serve as mandatory military medics. War does not have a woman’s face, yet Afghan women fight for their rights every day.

The radical movement *Taliban* (The Taliban are designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGTs) under Executive Order (E.O.) 13224) emerged in 1944. The organization’s goal is to introduce strict Islamic law in the country. The Taliban held power in the country from 1996 to 2001. The organization discriminates against women's rights in an attempt to establish order in the country.

On August 15, 2021, following an order from Joe Biden (the 46th president of the United States and a member of the Democratic Party) to withdraw American troops from Afghanistan to ensure the safety of U.S. military personnel, the Taliban took control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Hope crumbled, and an ideological shift took place.

Horrific bombings, torture, violence, and endless prohibitions became the reality for Afghan women. Taliban laws strip individuals of their right to religious freedom. The Quran (the holy scripture of Muslims) is misinterpreted, leading to new rules that discriminate against women's rights.

The movement claims to be aimed at “creating a safe environment for women where they can preserve their honor and dignity.” However, the oppression affected all aspects of women's lives, and they were banned from:

- Speaking to or shaking hands with a man unless he was a close relative.
- Speaking in public, including laughing.
- Wearing brightly colored clothing, as it might "arouse" men.
- Visiting gyms.
- Receiving education beyond the sixth grade.
- Traveling more than 45 miles without a male guardian (mahram).

Women became the property of men. The list of restrictions goes on endlessly. A dark era began for women. The new laws stripped them of all their basic human rights. The medical field was severely affected since men were not allowed to treat women and women were not allowed to receive medical education, maternal mortality rates increased, cases of sexual violence increased, and all shelters for women in crisis were shut down. As a result, suicide rates rose. Women lost their sense of purpose and will to live.

War has a careless, cold, and exhausted gaze. Afghan women were forced to fight for their right to receive an education, to treat other women, to exist safely in their own country, to choose a life partner, to look the way they wanted, and to follow the religion that was closest to them. Freedom has a woman's face.

Some people fled the country to Pakistan. On March 31, 60 Afghan women will be deported back, where they will face punishment under the full severity of Taliban law.

For this article, I interviewed two Afghan human rights activists. But there are many more women suffering under the new regime. Each of them needs psychological and physical help.

Samea Iffat - a former medical university student, midwife, and teacher shared the following with me:

"When we were children, the Taliban were a symbol of suffering in our lives. I remember how we secretly carried books, pretending we were going to study the Quran just to have a chance to learn. Twenty-four years ago, when the Taliban were leaving Afghanistan, gunfire rang out everywhere, bodies lay on the ground, fear and the cries of children filled the air, and we hid in underground shelters that our fathers had dug to save our lives. It was so dark and grim. We could only hear each other's voices and feel by touch that our family was near. We were children trapped by cruel people, and now, years later, our own children are experiencing the same fate.

I remember the Taliban whipping women. I was only seven years old when they struck me across the face because I wasn’t wearing a chador. I was afraid to even step outside.

When the Taliban returned twenty years later, I was no longer a frightened little girl. I had become a teacher, a midwife, and a woman who fought back. It was the second lesson of the school day when rumors started spreading that the Taliban had arrived. I couldn’t believe it. My husband called and said, ‘Come home immediately, the Taliban are already in Bagrami, Kabul.’ But I didn’t want to leave my students. When all the other teachers began crying and said the school had to be closed, fear gripped me, and my heart broke.

We left the school and went home. We were no longer allowed to return. From that moment, a new struggle began for us.

I was a medical student and a teacher at the same time. I suffered greatly. When our daughters cried at the closed school gates and returned home, my friends and I took to the streets of Kabul to protest against the Taliban’s inhumane and misogynistic orders.

The Taliban brutally suppressed us, beating us into silence. One day, they held us in an underground bank vault for eight hours, then attacked our homes. I fight for justice, gender equality, and women’s right to education and work.

After receiving multiple threats from the Taliban, they came to our house, threatened us, and used violence. Right before my eyes, they shot my friend to silence us. They issued an arrest warrant for me. Fortunately, I wasn’t home at that moment. After receiving a warning, I fled from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

This is about the restrictions the Taliban have placed on women. Afghanistan’s future under the Taliban is nothing but darkness, suffering, ignorance, poverty, and misery. Such policies do not serve the interests of the people."

– **Samea Iffat**

Violence, which has become the norm under Taliban rule, has also extended to women's right to choose a sexual partner. Girls are photographed naked, and cases of rape are not uncommon. Today, the lives of ordinary Afghan women are completely at odds with the human rights outlined by the UN. A woman, who wished to remain anonymous, shared the following:

– What was your childhood like?

"I was born on February 4, 2002, in Daikundi province, one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan. I spent my childhood there, but it was a difficult time. When I was just four years old, my father passed away, and life became hard for us. Thanks to the support of my mother and brother, I was able to overcome hardships. My only dream was to study.

There was only one elementary school in our village, and it was an hour walk from our home, but that distance felt insignificant compared to my dreams. I eagerly walked to school every day to get an education. The nearest secondary school was even farther, requiring a two-hour daily walk. Since transportation was not available, I had to go on foot to ensure I didn’t miss my studies.

Eventually, in 2019, I graduated from high school and moved to Kabul with my family to continue my education. In 2020, due to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to take the university entrance exam (Kankor). However, in 2021, I finally took the exam and scored 283 points, earning admission to the Faculty of Management and Public Policy at Kabul University. That was a moment of great joy for me because, as a girl from the impoverished Hazara region, I had managed to enter Kabul University. At that time, gaining admission to Kabul University was every student's dream."

– How did Afghanistan change when the Taliban took power?

"The year 2021 was a dark year for Afghanistan; the year the Taliban seized power, marking the beginning of dark days for Afghan women. When the Taliban arrived, fear and terror spread everywhere. The Taliban is a group that, even under the previous government, showed no mercy. They attacked schools, mosques, hospitals, educational institutions, sports clubs, wedding halls, and roads especially in Hazara-populated areas, mercilessly killing people."

– How did you become an activist?

"The Taliban directly targeted women, excluding them from all aspects of life – social, economic, political, educational, and professional. They humiliated women on the streets, yelling, 'Why are you dressed like that?' I witnessed such scenes myself. Once, on a bus, a girl whose hair was slightly visible was brutally attacked by a Talib. He struck her face and said, 'A Muslim woman should not look like this!' Then he forcefully pulled her scarf over her head. It was painful to watch, but I could do nothing but endure it in silence.

Such things happened daily in Afghanistan, and no one dared to stand up to the Taliban. Activists who fought against their violence were arrested, tortured, and punished. I was one of those who could not accept the ban on education for girls. So I joined civil activists and helped organize a campaign for the reopening of universities. Despite the terrible situation for women, we were all united in one thought: 'We have nothing left to lose!'

We organized mass protests and tried to make our voices heard by the world, even if the Taliban ignored us. But these protests were brutally suppressed. Those arrested were thrown into prison, where they were tortured and punished.

In 2022, the Taliban allowed girls to attend university, but only under the condition that they wore mandatory coverings. I was relieved that I could at least continue my studies, but when I thought about the girls who were completely banned from even attending school, my heart ached. We had no choice but to endure.

But that didn't last long either. On October 28, 2022, the Taliban issued an order stating that no girl was allowed to receive an education anymore. That day, I arrived at my English course at 6 AM as usual, but the guard at the gate stopped me and said, 'Don't you know? The Taliban ordered that no girl is allowed to study anymore.'

Oh my God! My heart shattered, and I couldn't breathe. A few other girls and I stood at the gate, looking at each other in tears. There was no hope left. After that, I fell into severe depression. Life lost all meaning. At times, I even thought about suicide. I could no longer smile. Every day, I recalled the long hours I spent walking to school and studying late into the night. But my mother always told me to endure.

I had already finished school and entered university, but I couldn't stay silent. After the universities were shut down, I began my activism. Along with other activists, we organized protests in front of Kabul University. But the Taliban crushed our protests with brutality. They fired shots into the air, forbade journalists from covering the events, and the situation became terrifying. Some activists managed to escape, but I and several other girls were arrested. They broke our phones, put us in separate cells, and beat us severely. They interrogated me: 'Whose orders are you following?' But I was only fighting for the reopening of schools and universities and for women's rights.

That was unacceptable to the Taliban. They do not see women as human beings. They stripped me of my clothing and took photographs. Then they threatened that if I continued my activism, they would publish those photos online. In the end, they forced me to sign a document stating that I would no longer participate in protests. Otherwise, my family and I would face death or life imprisonment. After 48 hours of torture, they released me."

– What are you fighting for?

I continue to fight. We have always raised the silenced voices of the women and girls of Afghanistan. We have repeatedly appealed to the world and to organizations that call themselves defenders of human rights, asking them to support us, to stand with the women of Afghanistan, and to help them. We fought with minimal resources under the fear and terror

created by the Taliban. I hope that our efforts will not go unnoticed and that one day we will see freedom for women, especially in areas such as work, education, and political participation. Women in Afghanistan must have the right to be part of these spheres, and this will only be possible if the international community puts pressure on the Taliban to bring about change.

– Can you tell us why you decided to leave?

After being released from Taliban prison, I stopped my activities for three months. When the new academic year was approaching, at the request of several civil activists, my sister and I participated in an advocacy program. Three days later, a list began circulating in various groups, including my name and the names of several other activists. It stated that those whose names were on the list were wanted by the Taliban. When I saw my name, I was in shock. I immediately changed my location and applied for a visa to Pakistan. In the end, on May 10, 2023, my family and I left Afghanistan and moved to Pakistan.

– How did the new regime treat you?

As I already mentioned, the Taliban first stripped me of all fundamental rights and freedom and then imprisoned me. In prison, I was whipped and insulted. They stripped me naked and took photos. When I was released, they demanded that I sign a pledge to remain silent and never speak out against them. They warned me that if I acted against their will, my family and I would face either death or life imprisonment. Ultimately, I was put on a wanted list, and I had no choice but to flee.

– I was told that you experienced violence. I am truly sorry that this happened to you. Can you share how it happened?

After the universities were closed, a few other civil activists and I staged a protest outside Kabul University. The Taliban attempted to stop us with warning shots into the air. Some activists managed to escape, but I and several others were arrested and imprisoned. We were placed in separate cells, stripped, photographed, and whipped. They shouted rude insults at us and demanded to know which group we belonged to. As someone fighting only for my own rights and those of other women, I could not convince them.

– If you can, tell us how it all started?

When we organized protests and chanted our slogans together, the Taliban entered, firing shots into the air. Some activists managed to escape, but I and several others were arrested. We were treated with extreme cruelty: we were stripped, photographed, whipped, and insulted.

– I understand how difficult this must be for you. Can you share how it all ended?

After 48 hours of imprisonment and torture, the Taliban released me on the condition that I sign a pledge to never again engage in political activity and to convince others not to do so either. Otherwise, my family and I would face a death sentence or life imprisonment. Once we were placed on a wanted list again, we had no choice but to leave the country and go into exile.

– How do you see Afghanistan in 3-5 years?

Nearly four years have passed since the Taliban came to power, yet the world continues to watch. No positive changes have occurred regarding women's rights; instead, even stricter laws have been implemented. Women are now forbidden from going outside without a mahram, and even hearing a woman’s voice has been banned for other women. I see Afghanistan’s future as very grim. I believe that, over time, Afghan society will begin to adopt the Taliban’s views, and people will stop sending their daughters to school. As a result, the rights that women lost under the Taliban will become the norm, and if anyone speaks about women's rights, it will be seen as absurd.

Let me tell you a short story about our village: about 15 years ago, when people were less informed, they sent their children to school only because of the aid provided by the educational institutions. In families, when a boy was born, a celebration was held, and everyone was happy, but the birth of a girl meant nothing, and no one rejoiced. I think this situation will repeat itself, possibly even in a worse form. Moreover, poverty is a significant problem in Afghanistan. Afghan society has become extremely impoverished, and in the future, even more grim and tragic conditions are being created for women.

– Have you heard about human rights defenders? Did you seek psychological support after what happened?

Human rights defenders are those who fight peacefully for the fundamental rights of individuals. This struggle takes various forms, one of which is advocacy. We work to protect the rights of women, ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, and the LGBTQ+ community in accordance with international human rights standards.

Freedom has a woman's face. Today, that face is marked by all the horrors and fears brought by the new regime against mothers, daughters, wives, and sisters. A woman’s body is not an object to be used or manipulated. A woman is a person!

War is a ruthless and bloody reality. It has nothing to do with gender. Strength and freedom belong to every individual. Through personal stories, we expose the horrors that have already become normalized. Are we truly ready to accept this?

When each of us dreams of fulfilling our dreams, becoming great individuals, moving forward, and making an impact in art, law, medicine, Afghan women are willing to risk their lives just to be recognized as human beings.

The article was worked on by:
Samea Iffat – interview, one of the women activists from Afghanistan.
Nurgali Aruzhan – translation from Farsi.
Maya Masumi – translation from Farsi.
Elena Lisavtseva – psychologist, psychoanalyst.
Sophia – raising awareness of the situation, searching for translators.
Anonymous – translations; writing the article; Afghan activist.

Translation to English by Iana Belokonnaia.

The title of the next issue of Valerie will be "He knows what he's doing." This issue, which will be released in mid-to-late may, will focus on male violence, especially sexual violence and domestic abuse, and the excuses people make for it - how they justify male depravity.

Please try to send in your submissions for this by the 15th of May.

I have also planned out the topics for the remaining issues of Valerie to be released this year.

July's topic will be women and disability. The intersection between feminism and disability rights, how disabled women's needs may sometimes be forgotten by feminism. How disabled girls and women are uniquely vulnerable to sexual abuse, and how they struggle with doctors, medical professionals, and even family not taking them seriously. Submissions on both physical and cognitive/developmental disabilities will be welcomed, as well as on chronic illness and chronic pain.

September's topic will be the mother daughter dynamic:
mothers who abuse their daughters, and mothers who don't. Teen mothers/single mothers. How some mothers will help indoctrinate their daughters into patriarchy, or ignore or even facilitate their male partners abusing their daughters. General writing on the trials of motherhood: post-partum depression/psychosis, regretting having children. Personal writing on your relationship with your own mother is also welcomed.

November: Sexual exploitation. The sex industry (pornography, prostitution, etc) and its impact.

If you have a submission for one of these upcoming issues, feel free to send it in early. I may be expanding Valerie to be a monthly zine in 2026, so having a backlog of submissions and being able to receive them ahead of time is very important.

You can find me on tumblr or kofi at moonshineshrew,
or check out https://valeriezine.neocities.org for more information.